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THE EFFECT OF THE CURRICULUM UPON THE SELF-CONCEPT OF CHILDREN IN RACIALLY INTEGRATED FOURTH GRADE CLASSROOMS.

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THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY WERE TO DETERMINE--(1) IF THE NEGRO CHILD'S SELF-CONCEPT WOULD IMPROVE SIGNIFICANTLY WHEN HE LEARNS ABOUT HIS HERITAGE, (2) IF THE CAUCASIAN CHILD'S SELF-CONCEPT WOULD IMPROVE SIGNIFICANTLY BY A STUDY OF THE NEGRO'S HERITAGE AND CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICA, AND (3) IF COMMUNITY CONTACTS INFLUENCE CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPTS. ALL THE FOURTH-GRADE CHILDREN ATTENDING 26 INTEGRATED CLASSES IN GARY, INDIANA, WERE DIVIDED INTO--10 EXPERIMENTAL CLASSES, NINE EXPERIMENTAL CLASSES WITH TRANSPORTED STUDENTS, AND SEVEN CONTROL CLASSES. THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS STUDIED A UNIT ON AMERICAN NEGRO HISTORY. PRE- AND POST-TEST INSTRUMENTS USED WERE THE PIERS-HARRIS SELF-CONCEPT SCALE AND A TEST OF FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE ON NEGRO HISTORY AND CULTURE. DATA ON THE PRE- AND POST-TEST RESULTS WERE ANALYZED FOR SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BY MEANS OF COVARIANCES. THE SELF-CONCEPT SCALE OF BOTH NEGRO AND WHITE CHILDREN IN THE UNTRANSPORTED EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY. IN INTEGRATED NEIGHBORHOODS, RAISING THE SELF-CONCEPT LEVEL OF ONE RACE APPEARS TO RAISE THE SELF-CONCEPT LEVEL OF THE OTHER RACE AS WELL. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS ARE DISCUSSED. STUDY LIMITATIONS ARE CONSIDERED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, FEBRUARY, 1968. (PS)

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THE EFFECT OF THE CURRICULUM UPON THE SELF-CONCEPT OF CHILDREN IN RACIALLY INTEGRATED FOURTH GRADE CLASSROOMS

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Objective: This study sought to ascertain what effect, if any, the school curriculum has upon the self-concept of children in racially integrated fourth grade classrooms. Specifically it had these three objectives:

a. To determine if the Negro child's self-concept would improve significantly when he gains knowledge about his heritage.

b. To determine if the Caucasian child's self-concept would improve significantly by a study of the Negro's heritage and contribution to America.

c. To determine the influence of community contacts upon children's self-concepts.

Review of the Literature: The literature tends to indicate that both Negro and white children who are disadvantaged tend to have a low self image. In a depth study by Deutsch of 400 children, convincing evidence was obtained showing that Negro and white children who are from a low socio-economic environment also often have a low concept of themselves. At the same time, however, Deutsch found self-concepts generally more negative among the Negroes in the group, concluding that "a relatively high proportion of the white lower-class children in this sample have negative self-responses, but not nearly as many as in the Negro group . . . . The Negro group as a whole is affected by lowered self-esteem(1)."

A study by Kenneth B. Clark, which only involved Negro children between the ages of three and seven (in both Northern and Southern communities),

provided further evidence along similar lines. When they were asked to choose between white and brown dolls, "the majority of these Negro children at each age indicated an unmistakable preference for the white doll and a rejection of the brown doll(2)."

In another study by J. K. Morland of preschool subjects in Virginia, the Negro children tended to identify with the whites--as did the white children themselves. Of his Negro subjects he observed that many who so identified themselves "did so reluctantly and with emotional strain(3)."

Marion Yarrow, et al. concludes that studies of prejudice in pre-school children reveal that both Negro and white children see the Negro as inferior(4). And B. R. McCandless declares, "Society is so organized as to lead the Negro child to devalue and perhaps even to reject his own ethnic group. The consequences of such rejection for the self-concept of Negro children are serious . . . . (5)."

These studies appear to indicate, therefore, that Negro children in general have a lower perception of themselves than do white children and that white children of a lower socio-economic status have a lower self-image than do white children of a higher socio-economic status.

It was therefore hypothesized that much of the negative attitudes that Negro children often have about themselves is the result of the lack of knowledge that they have about themselves and about their race's history, culture, and contributions to American and world civilization. The investigator's review of social studies material approved for school adoption by the textbook commission of his state confirmed that little factual information was included which showed the Negro's role in American life.

It was also hypothesized that white children who live in the same communities as the Negro children will tend to project some of the Negro's

negative self-image to themselves. As a result, they, too, will tend to feel inferior and that this inferiority is a result, to a large extent, to their proximity to the Negro.

Population: The subjects for this study were all fourth grade children attending twenty-six integrated classes in the Gary, Indiana, School City. This grade level was selected for two reasons.

1. The children in this grade are at an age level at which they can intellectualize factual material presented to them. Younger children were not selected for the study because in their case, the emotive factor predominates: They can not adequately comprehend, conceptualize, and then internalize factual knowledge so that it can be reflected in an improved self-concept. Older pupils were not used in the study because their habit patterns, outlook, and perceptions often are so firmly crystallized that factual information is wholly inadequate and ineffective in bringing about changes.

2. The school system participating in the project had already prepared a unit on American Negro history and culture for its fourth grade classes. This fact immensely simplified the work of the investigator.

Instruments: Three instruments were used in the study: the Purdue-Heath Measure of Social Class Identification, the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, and a Test of Factual Knowledge on Negro History and Culture, an instrument devised specifically for the study.

The Measure of Social Class Identification was developed at the Division of Educational Reference at Purdue University by Dr. Robert W. Heath. The instrument is based upon the following operational definition:

> The subjective social class of an individual is defined in terms of how he perceives the desirability of his father's or main provider's occupation in relation to each of a list of familiar occupations which represent a wide range of social desirability. The "how he perceives the desirability of his father's or main provider's occupation" is represented by the individual's response pattern to these items(6).

The Piers-Harris Measure of Self-Concept is, as its name implies, an instrument to ascertain the image that the child has of himself(7).

It was apparent, even at the time that the proposal for this study was being written, that a test of factual knowledge on Negro history and culture would have to be developed specifically for use with the project. The test that finally evolved consisted of two parts. The first was a multiple-choice instrument, with each item having five possible alternatives of which only one was correct; the second involved the identification of a list of individuals as to race, Negro or white, so that each item had only two alternatives, one of which was correct.

Procedures: In 1963, the Gary Public School System adopted a new social studies curriculum in which a unit on the American Negro was included for grade four. This unit formed the curriculum content used in the investigation.

Twenty-six classes participated in the study. Of this number, nineteen were designated as experimental groups and seven as control groups. The classes were equated on the basis of race, intelligence, achievement, and socio-economic level. Intelligence was determined by the data available from cumulative records. Achievement was gauged by the results of the achievement tests administered to the children during the previous year. The socio-economic level was judged by the "Measure of Social Class Identification." Of course, it would have been desirable that the three groups of participating teachers would have formed homogeneous groups as far as the factors of race, age, sex, and teaching experience are concerned, but practical considerations at Gary made exact balance and composition of the groups impossible to obtain. It may be assumed, therefore, that interactions were present which were not ascertained. The conclusions of the study thus must be based upon this limitation.

Composition of the Classes: The classes participating in this study were divided into three groups, the first two being experimental.

Group A - Ten classes of Negro and white children from the same neighborhood.

Group B - Nine classes of Negro and white children from different neighborhoods. Some children in this group were transported because of overcrowded conditions in their own neighborhood schools. This transported subgroup was predominately Negro.

Group C - Seven classes of Negro and white children from the same neighborhood. These were the control group.

An attempt was made, unsuccessfully, to include only integrated classes which consisted of at least twenty-five per cent of one race. This ideal percentage could not be met because of certain other demands of the study and the extreme mobility of the school population in some schools in Gary.

Gathering the Data: The teachers from the participating classes attended an initial in-service workshop where the study was discussed and explained. Subsequently, a series of workshop sessions were held for the teachers of the experimental classes where the unit was reviewed and the procedures used in teaching it were agreed upon. A schedule was set up for pre-testing, teaching the units, and post-testing. The instruments were now administered to the children.

The self-concept of all children in a class was measured by the Piers-Harris Scale because the investigator felt that significant changes may occur from a study of the unit among the Caucasian children in a class as well as among the Negro. A Caucasian child living in an integrated neighborhood, for instance, may have a low concept of himself because circumstances compel him to live in such a community. By raising his concept of the Negro through a study of the race's contribution to American and world culture, the investigator felt that considerable likelihood arose that the Caucasian child's self-concept also will be improved.

The test especially constructed for use in this project determining the pupils' knowledge of American Negro history and culture was also administered to the participating classes at this time.

The next step in carrying out the study was to teach the unit on "The American Negro." Only the experimental classes (Groups A and B) received instruction on this unit.

When the teaching of the unit was completed, "The Piers-Harris Measure of Self-Concept," and the test of factual information was again given to the children in all the classes.

Analyzing the Data: All the data for each instrument was analyzed to determine if any significant differences developed as a result of the children's study of the unit.

The data on the pre- and post-test results of the Piers-Harris Measure of Self-Concept and the Test of Knowledge (both its multiple-choice section and its identification quiz) were analyzed for significant differences by means of co-variance. This technique was employed to minimize the possibilities of extraneous factors influencing the results of the study. For instance, at the time that the unit was being taught to the experimental classes much publicity was being given to Negro accomplishments by the various media of communication in the city of Gary. As a consequence, another technique, such as the one of mean difference, would possibly have affected the results of the study to incur a possible significant gain also in the control group.

The three previously stated objectives will now be discussed in terms of the analytic procedures used and the findings which resulted.

Objective a: To determine the improvement of the Negro child's self-concept when he has knowledge of his heritage.

Objective b: To determine the improvement of the Caucasian child's self-concept by a study of the Negro's heritage and contribution to America.

The contribution of the curriculum on self-concept to both Negro and white children, analyzed by means of the covariance technique, was found to be significant at the .05 level for group A, the non-transported children. The same level of significance was maintained when the data was analyzed for the group as a whole, for only the Negro children, and for only the white children. It appears, therefore, that the curriculum can help improve both the Negro and white child's self-concept in certain cases--when both Negro and white child live in close proximity to each other.

Objective c: To determine the influence of community contacts upon children's self-concepts.

The influence of community contacts was evaluated by examining the pre- and post- self-concept scores for the A group, the non-transported pupils, and for the B group, the transported pupils. No significant changes were evident in the B group children, but significant changes did occur among the A group as a whole, as well as for the Negro and white children as separate sub-groups of that group. These differences in each case were significant at the .05 confidence level.

Discussion: Significant gains at the .05 level were recorded on the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale for group A, the non-transported group, for both the Negro and the white children in that group. Most of the schools which were attended by these children were located in the inner-city where an integrated housing situation exists. This finding is extremely important, indicating that the curriculum can make a difference in the way that children see themselves. The fact that the self-concept of the white children in the group also improved significantly tends to indicate that certain inter-racial factors are operative here which might be more closely related to the way the children in this group view themselves as a whole

rather than to any elements of race. Thus, by raising the self-concept level of the children of one race, the level of the children of the other race appears also to be raised. That is, the Negro child in this group begins to develop a sense of his worth and his race's importance, the white child who associates with him also develops a greater sense of his worth and importance. By raising the self-image of one, then, the self-image of the other is also improved.

Implications: The self-concept of children apparently can be improved through the curriculum. The study of the unit on American Negro History not only helped to improve the self-concept of the Negro children in experimental Group A who studied the unit, but also of the white children in their group. This one finding has tremendous implications for all who are any way involved with curriculum development: teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, textbook writers, and book publishers. A need is indicated for sufficient materials of high quality which portray adequately the role of the American Negro, past and present. Such material will benefit not only the Negro children psychologically, but also many white children. Furthermore, these findings would seem to imply that curriculum developers should seek to incorporate this material about the American Negro into the total curriculum of the school, rather than solely in isolated form. Curriculum developers thus have not only a responsibility, but an enormous opportunity.

The study does not explore the problem of the extension of these findings to races other than the Negro and white, to religious groups, or to nationalities in the United States. It would be logical to assume that these findings may also have some applicability to such groups. Further

research, however, is necessary before definite conclusions in this respect can be drawn.

Postscript: The content of the curriculum and the curricular materials affects significantly--it appears--the mental and emotional outlook of some children. Therefore, curriculum-makers have a responsibility to present accurately the role of the Negro in the formation of America, to give adequate balance and emphasis to his contributions, and to provide children with an opportunity to learn more about his accomplishments. By helping children to know more about the history and past of the Negro, they can at the same time help many students to gain a better perspective of themselves, of their personal worth, and of their potentialities.

1. Martin Deutsch, "Minority Group and Class Status as Related to Social and Personality Factors in Scholastic Achievement," Monograph No. 2, Society for Applied Anthropology, 1960, p. 11.

2. Kenneth B. Clark, Prejudice and Your Child (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 23.

3. J. K. Morland, "Racial Recognition by Nursery School Children in Lynchburg, Virginia," Social Forces, Vol. XXXVII, 1958, pp. 132-137.

4. Marion Radke Yarrow; Helen G. Trager; and Hadassah Davis, "Social Perceptions and Attitudes of Children." Genetic Psychology Monographs, Vol. XL, 1949, pp. 327-347.

5. B. R. McCandless, Children and Adolescents (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 381.

6. Further information about this instrument, including details concerning the procedures employed in its validation are given in: Robert W. Heath, "The Development of a Measure of Social Class Identification," Studies in Higher Education, No. LXXXVII, (Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Division of Educational Reference, January, 1958).

7. Ellen V. Piers and Dale B. Harris, Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. LV, No. 2 (1964), 94. Complete information about the Piers-Harris Measure of Self-Concept is presented in this report, pp. 91-95.